

9/21/21
PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Upper Coastal Plain Region Announces Detailed Study On Local Healthy Food Access, Food System, And Recommendations For Improvement

EDGECOMBE, HALIFAX, NASH, NORTHAMPTON, WILSON, NC,

For the past 18 months, over 42 organizations have been engaged in a massive effort to better understand and map the local food system, from farm to table, and develop recommendations on how to improve healthy food access, especially for those that are underserved. The effort also addresses the “local food value chain system” needs and opportunities to better understand how to support small and minority food farms, distributors, processors, buyers and others to help build new economic opportunity and resiliency.

Robert Hiatt, Executive Director of the Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments (UCPCOG), “The release of this assessment, its maps, and data is pivotal moment for the region. This marks the establishment of a shared analysis and understanding of the existing regional local food system, which in turn will create opportunities for larger and more coordinated development initiatives. Covid-19 really shined a light on how fragile the food system is here and how important growing and distributing food at the local level can be during times of unrest. Growing, processing, and distributing healthy food at the regional level helps ensure we don’t rely completely on outside sources to be fed. It keeps jobs and money used to buy food local, supporting the eastern NC economy.”

Chester Williams, Chief Empowerment Officer of A Better Chance, A Better Community (ABC2), who helped lead the project’s community engagement efforts notes, “We used a fantastic team of Community Healthy Champions in each county to engage with underserved residents to better understand their healthy food access challenges. Partners learned a lot about challenges with rural transportation, fresh food costs, community garden and urban agriculture restrictions, and so much more. Overall, the project engaged more than 400 people.”

Mary Jane Lyonnais, a healthy food access specialist with Albemarle Regional Health Services, noted that the project took a “Whole Systems” approach, “The teams ensured all of the issues regarding our food system were taken into consideration including Justice and Fairness, Healthy People, Vibrant Farms and Gardens, Thriving Local Economies and other important measures as we moved forward.”

This community engagement was combined with numerous interviews with farmers, area food policy council members like the Just Foods Collaborative of Nash and Edgecombe County, and others to integrate with heavy research and mapping of the existing local food system. Gabriel Cumming, Associate Director of Working Landscapes, “This original research is unprecedented in the region and unique in many ways for North Carolina. It allows anyone working with, or interested in, the local food system to understand what we have as a region and how to support improvements.”

Josh Humphreys, President of Croatan Institute, noted, “Healthy FAM brought together an intentionally inclusive community-based partnership that made the process of mapping the regional food system rooted in genuine community needs and experiences. The research and community engagement teams have developed an impressive series of interactive resources that help stakeholders navigate the region’s food value chains, understand its socio-economic challenges, and assess shovel-ready opportunities to advance equitable access to healthy, local food. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with Healthy FAM partners on implementing the project’s wide-ranging recommendations.”

“Perhaps most importantly,” notes Ron Townley, UCPCOG’s Planning and Development Services Director, “We used all this information to evaluate and make recommendations on how to improve and build out the local food system. That was the primary goal, empower the region to create new wealth and improved health through growing the local food system. Whether you are a community garden supporter, a small farmer, an food business operator, or just a food buyer – and that is all of us – there is information of value. Also, it is important to recognize that none of this would be possible without the generous support of the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust. They understood the importance of this work and have been a fantastic supporting partner.”

To view the project’s results or contact the team, visit <https://healthy-food-access-mapping-ucpcog.hub.arcgis.com/> or simply search “Upper Coastal Plain Healthy Food” on the web.

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The UCPCOG, established in 1971 under NC General Statute 160A-47, is the regional council of governments for the local governments located within Edgecombe, Halifax, Nash, Northampton, and Wilson Counties. UCPCOG is also the lead organization for the region’s Economic Development District, established through the United States Department of Commerce’s Economic Development Administration. For more information about UCPCOG, visit ucpcog.org. For more information about the food system mapping project, contact Ron Townley, rtownley@ucpcog.org or (252)-234-5965.

The Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust was established in 1947 and is now one of the largest private trusts in North Carolina. Their Mission is to improve the health and quality of life of financially-disadvantaged residents the North Carolina. The Health Improvement in North Carolina program area supports community-wide health solutions across the state.



The Healthy Food Access Mapping Project (Healthy FAM) creates deep transparency into the Upper Coastal Plain region's local, healthy food systems.

Thanks to generous support from the **Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust**, over 40 stakeholder organizations engaged with 6 lead entities to gather unprecedented input from 400+ people in the Upper Coastal Plain Region. Input was combined with data to analyze and assess the region’s local healthy food system and make over 65 recommendations in the areas of Access, Community Development & Planning, Community Gardens & Land-use & Urban Agriculture, Farms, Finance, Institutional Purchasing, and more.

Below is a Project Summary presentation, a “deep dive” story board, the detailed *Healthy FAM Assessment Report* and a Food System Map. Work shows known assets in the region from fresh food growers, distributors, processors, outlets, business consumers and more. Key health and economic information is also included. Information is intended to be leveraged by anyone wanting to further study, improve, and/or develop the local, healthy food system in an equitable and sustainable way.



Project Summary

[View presentation slides for the HFAM Project](#)



The Full Story

[View the Story Map for the HFAM](#)



HEALTHY FAM

Upper Coastal Plain Healthy Food Access Mapping Project

HFAM Assessment Report



Food System Map

[View the Food System Map](#)